



Plaintiffs Lawyers Find Their Niche: First Law Strategy, LLC

It's not every day that an established plaintiffs' lawyer leaves his position as a shareholder at a top-rated plaintiffs' firm to launch a boutique focused on appeals and public policy cases.

Maybe that's why David Senoff did it.

Senoff, along with Hillary Weinstein, [recently launched First Law Strategy Group](#) in Philadelphia. Prior to starting the new firm, Senoff was a shareholder at Anapol Weiss, a prominent Philadelphia-based personal injury firm, where he focused on class actions, mass actions, insurance bad faith, complex commercial litigation and professional malpractice matters. Weinstein was an associate at Anapol Weiss and worked under Senoff. Christina McNally, who was Senoff's paralegal at Anapol Weiss, rounds out the First Law team.

Senoff said that his decision to launch First Law Strategy Group was based on public policy cases becoming a growing focus of his practice over the past decade. Had he not launched the firm, he would have had difficulty continuing to build that side of his practice. That's because, as he put it, at a larger law firm, "there are much different obligations to others who may not share the same interests [he does]," particularly when it comes to supporting certain legal practices.

Senoff additionally hopes to provide cost-effective appellate services to the trial bar. Because most plaintiff-side trial work is handled on a contingency basis, Senoff [said](#) appellate work "is sort of a luxury in a plaintiffs' firm. The smaller firms and even some of the larger firms are just not equipped to do that." He believes there is an unmet demand among plaintiffs' firms for more affordable outside appellate counsel. By establishing a law firm where appellate work is just one of a number of legal services provided, Senoff believes he can price his appellate fees competitively—supplementing those fees with fees from the firm's other practices.

THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP BUG STRIKES AGAIN

Senoff and Weinstein continue a trend that has picked up steam recently—lawyers leaving larger law firms and [creating their own](#) boutiques. In fact, around the same time First Law Strategy Group opened its doors, [two other litigation boutiques also set up shop](#) in the Philadelphia region.

So, what gives with lawyers leaving more established firms to hang their own shingles?

For plaintiffs' lawyers like Senoff and Weinstein, they might simply be wired to take advantage of such opportunities when they arise. When discussing his decision to launch First Law Strategy Group, Senoff said that he thought "plaintiffs [lawyers] are almost by definition entrepreneurial at heart." This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone in the legal industry. Because the most successful plaintiffs' lawyers must be creative and innovative with the legal claims they prosecute, it stands to reason that this same creativity and innovative spirit would seep into their approach to building their legal practices.

TAKING SOME RISK IN ORDER TO REAP BIG, BUT NOT JUST MONETARY, REWARDS

Make no mistake, the practice of law is a business and not just a profession. Like any other business, whenever a new law firm is established there is naturally a risk of failure. But there is also the potential for big rewards.

Lawyers like Senoff and Weinstein who take the plunge and bet on themselves are not just doing so because they want more of a say in administrative decisions. They realize that when they go out on their own, they have the potential to maintain or increase their income—even when they lower their fees.



As most equity partners know all too well, they are the ones at law firms who shoulder the costs necessary to keep their firms running. A law firm's *revenues* only turn into *profits* after expenses have been accounted for. But when lawyers go out on their own, they are able to reduce overhead, which allows more of those revenues to stay in their pockets as profits. [According to some estimates](#), lawyers may be able to take home as much as 50% more of each dollar billed when they leave a large firm to launch or join a small firm.

Of course, launching a law firm will be easier for those lawyers whose practices are self-supporting. Lawyers whose practices rely heavily on clients and resources from other practice groups in a large firm are going to have an uphill battle as there is no guarantee that that work would come with them or be referred out to them once they break away.

But without the need to maintain a minimum profit margin to satisfy their colleagues' thirst for profits, lawyers can build their new firms on whichever legal practices they want. This flexibility to work on cases that may be less profitable but more intellectually and morally stimulating might be all the motivation some lawyers need to hang a shingle. Senoff made clear that First Law Strategy Group's appellate practice may not be as profitable as others but is one that is in demand and of personal interest to him.

Additionally, building a law firm from the ground up allows lawyers to develop a firm culture from the ground up. Some lawyers may have ideas for an innovative culture that breeds more happiness and loyalty than is typically found in law firms.

NOT THE FIRST, AND CERTAINLY NOT THE LAST

As the launch of First Law Strategy Group shows, the trend of lawyers of all stripes leaving larger firms to launch their own boutiques is not showing any signs of slowing down.

Considering the fact that the trend provides lawyers with the potential to be more in control of their firms' revenues, profits, legal practices and cultures, a slowdown is unlikely to occur anytime soon.

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